

# WITH MY INDIAN FRIENDS

First of a Short Series of Sketches  
in the Northwest

By FRANKLIN WELLES CALKINS

Author of "Indian Tales," "Frontier Sketches," "Hunting Stories," "Tokala Noni," Etc.

## I. Red Cloud

MY first meeting with the Chief was in 1875, when encamped with the United States Commissioners then negotiating with the Indians of his tribe for a cession of the Black Hills gold-bearing territory. Red Cloud was in opposition, and I well remember his high stern face and angry stride as he came from an irritating session in the endlessly debating council.

He certainly looked the part to which the "yellow" romances of "Wild Life in the West" have assigned him, except that there was not in his face any of that brutal savagery so long and popularly credited to him. Even in his angry moods there was something fine and dignified in his bearing. No one to-day can look at a correct cut of his face, at least no one with discerning powers, without recognizing a man of dignity and character.

In that picturesque village of some four or five thousand wild Sioux, his was easily the first figure and the foremost to capture my boyish imagination.

I did not then, of course, have the opportunity for intimate acquaintance which came to me in maturer years. I was a lad yet in my teens, but on one occasion I remember sitting for a long time within the intimate circle of Red Cloud's tepee. To this advantage I was indebted to "Old Missouri," our guide in a recent excursion into the Black Hills, from which a party of us had been ousted by troops under Captain Benteen and upon complaint of the Chief Spotted Tail. It was my fortune to capture "Old Missouri's" fancy. He was a "squaw man" with a large family of half-breeds, and at his shack I was a frequent visitor. One evening Red Cloud sent for him, and it was his humor to take me along.

"Old Missouri" spoke the Sioux language like a native and was trusted by the Indians, and I soon discovered, when we were ushered into Red Cloud's tepee, that he had brought me there for a purpose. He knew that I was connected with a country newspaper and was taking notes and keeping a diary of my Western experience, and when, as I fancied upon entering the lodge, Red Cloud looked at me with an inquiring frown, "Old Missouri" said a few words in the Sioux. Immediately Red Cloud responded with an earnest "Han-han!" which is the Sioux exclamation of emphatic assent.

"I'm going to tell you now what the Chief says," said "Old Missouri" to me, "and I want you to remember it and write it down in them books of yours. These government reporters ain't putting things down straight at all, and it may be you can have something printed that will show Red Cloud's ideas about selling their land."

This was flattering. Though I failed to see of what avail to the Indian my report in a country newspaper would be, I was glad of the opportunity offered to my youthful pen. There followed a long and to me interesting talk, in which Red Cloud told of the day's proceedings in council and of what he had said in debate. All this was duly interpreted for my benefit.

I have to-day the sheets upon which "Old Missouri's" translation of Red Cloud's talk was written. They might be of interest to the reader—undoubtedly would—but there is not room to include them in this article. In fact, there was much repetition of the familiar plea of the Indian against further cession of territory by the white people. There was also repetition and interpretation of the speeches of Red Cloud and American Horse which had been made that day in council. Both of these speeches, translated back into Sioux, I have since delivered at several "Indian Entertainments."

My deepest impression of that evening, however, was a family gathering of the wild folk, the first to which I had had a sitting, and there was matter for surprise in it. The Chief's family, then present, were his wife, a young son, daughter and niece. The quiet talk and good manners of this group, who sat opposite us upon some robes, was a revelation in savage life. When, in a lull in our conversation, some ripe plums, heaped upon a turtle-shell bowl, were set before us by the niece, her pretty and modest way of presenting the gift was

attractive enough to command my youthful admiration.

And later on, at the close of our conference, when I picked up a pipe of the famous red pipe-stone which Red Cloud had been smoking, and expressed my admiration of the fine quality and polish of its bowl and the carving of its wooden stem, he graciously made me a present of it. Then he spoke to his wife, who said "Han-han!" rose and searching the depths of her work-bag, which hung upon the wall, drew forth a finely beaded tobacco-sack and presented it to me. All this was done in a manner which, if it was not civilized, might certainly have sufficed as a pattern in any well-regulated family of my race.

It was only the next day that we were ordered to move on, and so for a time I lost track of Red Cloud and his Sioux.

It was exactly eleven years later that I assisted in building the Elkhorn branch of the Chicago & Northwestern Railway through Northern Nebraska and Eastern Wyoming. At one of my railway camps it was my good fortune to have my tents pitched beside those of Red Cloud's hunting village. For weeks we camped side by side, and our intimacy was enhanced by a mutual passion for hunting.

One day, shortly after Red Cloud and his people had camped beside us, I came in from a hunt after antelope and with my wagon loaded with a dozen specimens of all sorts of the game. It was insisted in camp that I should have a photograph taken of the bunch, and so a photographer was summoned from the nearest "end-of-track" town. It was after he had grouped us and I was posing, sitting upon my pony with an antelope tied behind across the saddle and my pile of game in front, that Red Cloud came into camp from his village. The Chief was much impressed with the scene, and when finally he was shown a finished photograph he showed keen pleasure and appreciation.

Some days later he sent a French half-breed, who had married a member of his band, to ask me if I did not want to go hunting with him. It was early in the morning of a clear and beautiful October day, and I concluded that a hunt with Chief Red Cloud was just the recreation that I needed. In a half-hour we were off on our ponies. I had then learned to speak the Sioux after a fashion, and I look back to that day's hunt as one of the most entertaining of my life.

The Chief was able to show me some tricks in approaching the antelope in exchange for my exhibition of shooting with a long-range rifle.

Our choicest feat of the day was under his supervision, when we dismounted from our horses and approached a herd of antelope walking across a plain as level as a barn floor. The thing was simple enough. With a whole bunch of antelope paused and at gaze, at a half-mile distant, we walked straight up within shot of them. Does this seem incredible? Nothing could have been easier. With his knife the Chief cut branches from the surrounding sage-bush, selecting them carefully. These he arranged in a cluster, tying the ends with buckskin strings and so arranging the bunch that by stooping to a half-bent posture the branches would cover the body of the holder. Then holding this cover before him, the Chief went forward at a steady pace. I followed in his footsteps, and his approach was certainly admirable. There did not seem to me a quiver of a twig as he advanced, step by step, gliding forward like an intangible wraith.

It was tiresome business, but we actually walked



The Chief's Praise of This Shooting Was Generous

within one hundred and fifty yards of the game without alarming them. Then the sage-bush blind was dropped and our rifles spoke. Five antelope were the bag we gained by this coup. Four of the animals, all running shots, fell to my rifle, and the Chief's praise of this shooting was generous.

It was this hunt, I think, which put me near to the Chief's friendship which grew upon us in the days that followed. Red Cloud often visited with me in my commissary tent, and just as often perhaps, I sat with him in front of his tepee on mellow autumn evenings.

One evening I related to him an encounter of a party with whom I was traveling from Fort Laramie in a rush for the gold-fields of the Black Hills, wherein a war-party of his own young men had first parleyed with and then attacked us, hoping to drive us back off of Indian territory. We had beaten off his young bucks, but when I admitted to him that they were wholly in the right and we were wholly in the wrong, the Chief warmed to me as he had never done before.

It was after this that I began to get at the true character of the man. He then began to talk and to tell of his own wars and fightings with the people of my race, and in these reminiscences his point of view as the warrior and the patriot came to the front. His attitude on the question of war was absolutely frank and friendly. He had been fighting for his people and for the preservation of Sioux territory intact. There did not show in any of his conversation or interpretation of his acts anything of the vindictive savage. He had fought to preserve his nation as truly as any men of civilized life have fought to preserve theirs. And I must say that he had accepted the inevitable in a spirit of philosophy which was admirable and which might well be copied by those among the more highly organized races who have suffered similar reverses.

His attitude was, in fact, the attitude of a Japanese leader of to-day. War was a question of controlling territory and food supply. The strong arm must prevail and the weaker should follow in philosophic submission.

Aside from this attitude, I found him a man of an honest type of thought and dealing, singularly frank and open among those whom he admitted to intimacy. And toward others he maintained that constant and impenetrable shell of reserve which, always presenting the stolid, unimpressionable surface, has led the civilized man to think that the Indian is a stoic, and without any of the human emotion which plays so large a part in the franker civilized life.

Such was Red Cloud as I knew him, a strong man—barbarian if you will, but possessing many of the qualities of a great leader of men.